



## Episode 2: New York's State School Safety Model

**#REMSontheAir Podcast Intro (Recorded):** [00:00:00] Welcome to the #REMSontheAir Podcast, hosted by your partners at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools and its Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center. If you're an old friend, you know us as the REMS TA Center, your national school safety center.

Join us as we chat about key topics in school and campus safety, security, and emergency management with experts and partners from the field.

**Janelle Hughes:** Hello and welcome back. This is Janelle Hughes, project director of the REMS TA Center. I'm joined by our Training Manager Amanda Everett, and today we're going to talk about state school safety center models and how they vary across the country. We are so lucky to be joined by our partners within the New York [00:01:00] State Department of Education and the New York Center for School Safety.

Although not every state has what can be described as a school safety center, many do. And for those states that do, the purpose, format, and goals of their safety focus centers, initiatives, and efforts truly vary from state to state. In some states, the school safety center serves as an independent entity with a unique Website and URL. And in other cases, and in other states, the school safety center is actually an office or a department within the state education agency, also known as the SEA.

And of course, in other states, the SEA works in collaboration with another state agency that manages the school safety center. So, the models really look different from state to state.

**Amanda Everett:** Yes, Janelle, you're so right. That's why I think it may be a good idea to spend the first part of today's episode walking through a description of a school safety center and talking through how [00:02:00] they can help support statewide school preparedness and planning while providing for the whole school community.

**Janelle Hughes:** Let's do it. The broad definition of school safety and school preparedness has grown over the years, as well as the roles of agencies within states in supporting school safety, security, emergency management, and preparedness. State education agencies, also known as SEAs, often play a role in developing guidance, training, and technical assistance, while state school safety centers often provide support with building capacity at the local and school building levels through the provision of training and technical assistance.

The roles of SEAs in school safety centers truly vary from state to state.

**Amanda Everett:** Yes. In recent years, as school communities have been better integrated within state and local preparedness frameworks supporting responsive recovery—for example, the state emergency operations centers, joint field office structures [00:03:00]—some of the

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collaborative SEA and center partnership models have helped to facilitate the seamless integration of education in school programs, resources, and aid with these state structures. This was evident during recent emergency incidents, including Hurricane Harvey. The collaboration between the Texas Education Agency and its Texas School Safety Center helped support and facilitate direct support to the affected regional and local school communities before, during, and after the storm.

**Janelle Hughes:** You're so right, Amanda. A few years ago, that model was further strengthened by a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services–led initiative with support from the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the U.S. Department of Education and us, the REMS TA Center. And this initiative was called the Texas Peer-to-Peer Support Initiative, which included representation from schools and districts across the state.

The Texas [00:04:00] Education Agency used this support initiative and worked with their regional education agencies as the framework from which to build its statewide safe school program while providing support to leaders managing recovery for their schools.

**Amanda Everett:** There are various models many SEAs use independently or in collaboration with their school safety centers to build capacity and support capacity building by their regional and local education agencies.

For example, as we just described with Texas, some have identified and worked with leaders and teams at the regional level to provide capacity-building support, training, and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Simultaneously, they can help identify topics for development and subject matter experts throughout the state.

The goal is to establish these professionals as leaders or mentors; invest in their continued professional development on their particular topic; also, create opportunities for the leaders and mentors to develop [00:05:00] and provide statewide training and technical assistance.

**Janelle Hughes:** Another model is to provide statewide services via the regions, as we just discussed with Texas. Some states designate leaders from the SEA and leaders from the state school safety centers to collaborate and manage communication and to provide that support to the regional levels. The regional education agencies then conduct collaborative trainings at the district and school levels.

And, lastly, a third model may involve offering statewide opportunities to participate in school safety–focused activities. SEAs and their school safety centers have virtual meetings and teleconferences within the regional and district school safety leads. They host a Web page or portal dedicated to school safety training and TA, along with additional activities such as convening monthly teleconferences, the virtual meetings to convey expectations and

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requirements, to share training and TA resources, and [00:06:00] to respond to inquiries that come in from regional and district personnel.

Some SEAs and school safety centers also partner to host regular webinars and produce fact sheets on key topics impacting their states. This may also include conducting monthly or quarterly trainings on key topics in school safety or higher ed safety, including state legislation, hosting an annual school safety conference and inviting all schools and districts, and/or sending weekly school safety–related communications via the agency or school safety center to everyone in the school community. There are truly so many options.

So now we're going to pivot and talk to our partners in New York about the model that they use. We are so lucky to be joined today by Michelle Shahen from the New York State Education Department and Tina Tierney from the New York Center for School Safety.

Hi, Michelle. Hi, Tina, and welcome. [00:07:00]

**Tina Tierney:** Hi, Janelle.

**Michelle Shahen:** Hi, Janelle. Thanks for having us.

**Janelle Hughes:** We are so happy to have you here. Michelle, I'm hoping that you can talk a little bit about where the New York Center for School Safety is housed within your state and a little bit about the safety center's relationship to the New York State Education Department.

**Michelle Shahen:** Sure, thanks, Janelle. So within New York State, oversight of many things related to school safety and supports for schools in that area lies within the Office of Student Support Services. We're a relatively small team, small but mighty, and we manage a number of different programs, but we—to do that, we rely on the assistance of a technical assistance center.

We have a [00:08:00] contracted vendor to perform that function. The New York State Center for School Safety contract is held by Measurement Incorporated. And Tina Tierney is the director of our Center for School Safety, the person who's joined—joining us today.

**Janelle Hughes:** We are so happy to have Tina joining, as well. Tina, can you tell us a little bit more about the New York Center for School Safety?

**Tina Tierney:** Absolutely. Thanks, Janelle. So, as Michelle noted, we are a contractor for the State Education Department's Office of Student Support Services. And so we provide professional development and also technical assistance to schools and districts throughout New York State.

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And our project activities are aligned with the legislative intent and regulations of two laws within New York State: the Safe Schools Against Violence in Education, or Project SAVE, as well as the [00:09:00] Dignity for All Students Act, or DASA, as well as other priorities of the State Education Department.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you for sharing that, both Tina and Michelle. Michelle, I want to turn it back to you for a moment. Can you talk about what ways you have seen this relationship between you and the safety center benefiting the schools in your state?

**Michelle Shahan:** I can, Janelle, thank you. So, New York is a—is a big state. We have more than 4,000 public schools. We have about 350 charter schools across 700 school districts, and we have about 1,700 nonpublic schools. That's a lot of schools and students and families to provide support to, so the Center for School Safety has been tremendous [00:10:00] in helping SED [State Education Department] provide support to schools. They do statewide professional development. Usually we do a summer tour—this past year because of COVID, we have switched from in-person trainings to providing online trainings or virtual trainings, which has been amazing. They have helped us this past year, since January of 2021, with implementing our Grants to States for Emergency Management grant and they have provided virtual training and developing high-quality emergency operations plans 14 times since January to more than 500 LEAs, which is no small feat.

**Janelle Hughes:** Not at all. That is quite a feat and quite an accomplishment. [00:11:00] And to your point, thinking about how large the state is in the number of schools, I am sure that there are a lot of unique characteristics of those schools in the school districts within the state.

Tina, I am going to turn it back to you for a moment. I'm hoping you can talk a little bit more about that experience with providing that training support to the schools and those local education agencies in the state.

**Tina Tierney:** Absolutely, we'd be happy to talk about that. So our collaborative relationship with the State Education Department is really the cornerstone or the centerpiece of how we can do this. Michelle and I meet weekly to talk about priorities and map out our next steps and plans.

And sometimes that becomes more frequent than weekly. Sometimes we talk daily to do that. This is such an important topic, the emergency response planning and developing those plans for schools and districts, so when we [00:12:00] began the process, we talked about how do we work together to get these sessions off the ground.

And there's a lot of steps, as everyone knows, to that, including a training announcement and registration and delivery of content, as well as accessibility to answer those really important

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questions that schools and districts are going to have when they're on the session and they start reflecting on what they need to do to create a high-quality emergency operations plan.

So we developed a plan of action on how to get it off the ground and we worked together to do that, and both of our teams really put a lot of work in to have it become a successful endeavor.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you for sharing that, Tina, because I was excited to learn about your Developing District-Wide and Building-Level Emergency Response Plans two-part virtual training program.

I am hoping that you can share, Michelle, [00:13:00] some, and/or Tina, some lessons that you learned from that experience, particularly in thinking about developing that training and providing it to your LEAs in collaboration with each other.

**Tina Tierney:** Sure, so I'll jump in. I think, Janelle, you already mentioned that each school has such different needs and is in such a different place of planning.

So what we wanted to do is provide a session that was relevant to all—all schools, no matter where they are in that planning process and developing that high-quality plan. So, yeah, we collaborated on what are the key concepts, what is required by regulation, as well as the really important REMS resources that really guided the delivery of the content.

We talked about the planning process, which is a really essential step for a school to talk about and to undertake, as well as those preparedness missions and how to plan for before, [00:14:00] during, and after. So those REMS resources were essential in helping us determine what is applicable to all schools, no matter where they are in that planning process.

**Janelle Hughes:** We truly appreciate you saying that, Tina, and we are so happy to hear that they are helpful. And to all of our listeners out there, if you have not already joined our mailing list, we do encourage you to do so as we are continually releasing new resources. I do have one final question for you, Michelle. I am hoping, and you both spoke about this a little earlier, I'm hoping you can share a little bit about some lessons that you've learned about the importance of having these relationships in place. And I'm sure you've learned a lot about that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the support that the school center has been able to provide to you.

**Michelle Shahan:** Thank you, [00:15:00] Janelle. I agree, the past year and a half has taught us so much about how to connect with people in a different way and how life-changing, you know, the lack of in-person interaction can be. But the need to be responsive and, you know, flexible and adjust is—I think we've all been reminded of that over the last 18 months. Connecting with

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schools to hear, and the feedback that we received as part of the training process has been essential to us.

Each time the training has been delivered, it's changed slightly based on the feedback that we received from the group. You know, we've strengthened areas and revised content [00:16:00] where necessary. And we continue to develop new training resources as an outcome of that. So it's exciting. You know, people are telling us what they need and want more information and more assistance on. And that's what we're here to do. So, it's an ex—it's an exciting time.

**Janelle Hughes:** Thank you for sharing that. And, you know, to your point, it's all about responding to those needs and remembering that emergency operations plans are living and breathing documents, and they have to be responsive to those changes and those lessons learned from emergency incidents that take place.

And we just so appreciate all that you do, Michelle, and all that you do, Tina, to support the schools, the students, the families, and caregivers in your [00:17:00] state. And we thank you also for being here today as a part of this #REMSontheAir podcast.

**Michelle Shahan:** Thank you, Janelle.

**Tina Tierney:** Thank you, Janelle.

**Janelle Hughes:** To assist SEAs and their partners as they build their capacity in providing training and technical assistance to their schools and school communities, the REMS TA Center has developed several resources and training opportunities with our Federal partners to make the guidance easier to learn, understand, and implement.

More, we have developed trainings and technical assistance materials for you to use and customize to your state so that the materials reflect the common needs of your schools and districts. Our goal at the REMS TA Center is to make the work of SEAs and their partners easier as they work together to build capacity and provide that training and TA.

In particular, we want to highlight our Specialized Training Packages, [00:18:00] which education agencies can download and use as is or customize for their purposes. You can access those packages by visiting our Website and clicking the Training tab. And from there, you can select Specialized Training Package.

Now that you've learned more about this topic, we encourage you to find out how you can make more connections between partners across your state. Remember, the goal and aim is always to help ensure safe and supportive learning environments in schools.

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**Amanda Everett:** Absolutely. Thanks so much for tuning in today. Remember to follow us on social media and bookmark the *#REMSontheAir* hashtag and tweet us using *#REMSontheAir* if you are addressing similar topics.

**Janelle Hughes:** And, as always, if you have any questions on the things we discussed today, or want to learn more, send us your questions by [00:19:00] email or call us at 1-855-781-7367.

Don't forget that you can also email us at any time at [info@remstacenter.org](mailto:info@remstacenter.org) to join our mailing list where you'll get up-to-date information on webinars, Web chats, and other virtual opportunities to learn and share.

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Our podcast page also provides access to applicable resources on the topics we covered today. Thank you so much for tuning in.